

EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT
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7 June 1984

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SHIFT IS REPORTED ON C.I.A. ACTIONS

Reagan Is Said to Limit Group
Ruling on Covert Moves

By LESLIE H. GELB

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 10 — Early in his term, President Reagan abolished interdepartmental consultations for covert operations by the Central Intelligence Agency, a move that continues to influence the number and character of covert operations, according to former and present senior officials of the Administration.

In interviews last week, the officials said the President abandoned the long-standing procedure in favor of discussions and decision-making by a small group of senior political and national security advisers. One result of the reorganization, some officials said, was a fivefold increase since the last year of the Carter Administration to over 50 continuing operations.

Reducing Risk of Disclosures

The intent of this reorganization, the officials said, was to reduce the risk of unauthorized news disclosures. But according to knowledgeable officials, the result has been a sharp and steady expansion of covert actions by the C.I.A., a result in part of the organizational shift.

About half of the 50 continuing opera-

Continued on Page A8, Column 1

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NY Times
11/2/86

Reagan Said to Change Policy On Covert Actions of C.I.A.

Continued From Page A1

tions are said to be in Central America, with a large percentage in Africa as well.

These programs include everything from paramilitary operations to funneling money to friendly hands, to the collection of information by individuals in sensitive positions.

Administration Opinion Divided

Opinion is sharply divided within the Administration over whether suitable personnel have been available to carry out all of these sensitive activities, whether proper control at the policy level has been maintained and whether the accomplishments have been worth the risks.

Where officials agree, however, is that the reorganization removed from the review process most of those military and diplomatic experts in a position to judge feasibility, risks and connections to other policies and activities. The one exception has been operations in Central America, almost all of which, officials said, have been conceived and nurtured at the upper floors of the State Department and in the Inter-American Affairs Bureau.

Planning Group Established

Soon after his inauguration, Mr. Reagan set up what he called the National Security Planning Group to deal with particularly important issues in an informal setting, according to the former and present officials. In addition to the President, the planning group members are said to include Vice President Bush; Secretary of State George P. Shultz; Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger; Robert C. McFarlane, the national security adviser; William J. Casey, Director of Central Intelligence; James A. Baker 3d, White House chief of staff; Michael K. Deaver, Mr. Baker's deputy, and Edwin Meese 3d, the President's counselor.

As distinguished from formal National Security Council meetings, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is not a member, the officials said, nor are aides generally allowed to attend.

When intelligence activities are discussed, the Attorney General is invited, along with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, the officials said, adding that Mr. Casey was also usually accompanied by his deputy for clandestine operations.

As a general rule, officials said those at the meetings were given no advance notification that proposed covert operations were to be discussed at a meeting. They said papers normally prepared by the C.I.A. were passed out at the meeting itself and then collected at the end of the meeting. According to knowledgeable sources, Mr. Reagan usually makes his decision at the table.

No Advice From Staff

Thus, according to the sources, those who attend are often without the benefit of staff advice before or during the meeting.

It is troubling to several officials that people able to give professional judgments are absent and that political advisers with no background in these matters are present.

"There's nobody there to tell these guys what the problems will be, what could go wrong," one official said.

Another policy-level official said, "There is also the problem that the

people at the top of this Administration are fascinated with covert operations and find it easier to approve them than to discuss complicated diplomatic matters."

Mr. Casey, in particular, was cited as a strong advocate of clandestine action. Several sources said he did so on several occasions against the advice of C.I.A. agents and analysts.

Most of the sources agreed that the C.I.A. as an institution had not been a strong promoter of covert operations since the early 1970's — after Congressional investigations of these activities, after many of the operations began to seep into the public domain, risking exposure of agents, and after many covert agents were dropped from the agency's rolls.

Reagan Aware of 'Carping'

A former senior official said Mr. Reagan was aware that "carping," by the departments would occur as a result of his reorganization. But this former official said the President wanted his senior advisers to focus on the issues themselves and not have people around always saying why things could not be done.

By all accounts, however, Mr. Reagan's stated goal was to preserve secrecy.

The officials interviewed acknowledged that this involved a judgment on the part of senior White House aides and the President that most of the disclosures were coming from key Pentagon and State Department personnel rather than from senior levels or from Congress. By law the President must tell Congressional intelligence committees of covert operations and certify they are in the national interest.

These officials insisted that by and large secrecy had been maintained, and that given the volume of clandestine operations now under way the overwhelming number remained secret. In any event, they said the President was prepared to accept the trade-off between losing the value of expert advice and holding down the chances of public disclosure.

Previous administrations made the choice the other way. Sometime during the first Eisenhower Administration, a special group was set up to approve and monitor covert operations. It was first known as the 54/12 Group, then the 303 Committee in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, and then under Presidents Nixon and Ford as the 40 Committee. In each case the designation derived from the code number of the decision document creating the group.

Security Adviser Was Chairman

From the 1960's on, the chairman of the group was the President's national security adviser. Group members included the Deputy Defense Secretary, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, the Director of Central Intelligence and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Assistant Secretaries of State usually attended when the proposed "black" operation was to be in their region of the world, and papers were normally distributed in advance of the meetings.

President Carter upgraded the members to include the Secretaries of State and Defense, in what was called the Security Coordinating Committee for Intelligence. But most of the meetings remained at the Under Secretary and Assistant Secretary level.